



western ribbon snake

Thamnophis proximus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Family:	Colubridae

Features

The most slender of Iowa's garter snakes, the western ribbon snake, is usually 20 to 30 inches long. It has a pair of large light-colored spots on the head, a black back, and an orange stripe in the middle of the back. Light stripes are found along the length of the body on the sides. The belly and chin are greenish-white. The scales are keeled (ridged). The body is very slender with the tail more than one-fourth the body length.

Natural History

The western ribbon snake lives in and around streams, ditches, marshes, edges of ponds and lakes, and sometimes in upland woods. It eats frogs, toads, salamanders, fish, tadpoles, earthworms, leeches, small mammals, and birds. This semiaquatic animal moves quickly; climbing and swimming easily. It is active during the day in spring and fall, becoming nocturnal in the hottest summer months. When alarmed, it may flatten its body and release an

unpleasant musk from the glands at the base of its tail. The western ribbon snake may hibernate in rock crevices with other snake species. Mating occurs in April or May. The female gives birth to three to 25 young in July or August, the number depending on the female's size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs) and age.

Habitats

constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes; interior rivers and streams

Iowa Status

common, native

Iowa Range

southern two-thirds of Iowa

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.